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By Pam Kendall

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection has approved the state's erosion and sediment control permit for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

This is a very significant milestone for the project and one of only a few remaining approvals needed to begin construction. This brings West Virginia one step closer to the thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity the project will bring to communities across the state, according to a press release from Dominion Energy spokesman Aaron Ruby.

"We commend the agency's staff for the years of hard work and careful study they've dedicated to reviewing the project. For more than three years, the agency carefully reviewed the project and considered extensive public input. The agency followed a rigorous process and left no stone unturned. The agency's approval includes numerous conditions to strengthen protections for water quality and other natural resources," Ruby said.

"At every stage of the project we've taken great care to meet the highest water quality standards. In many cases, we've gone above and beyond regulatory requirements and adopted some of the most protective measures ever used by the industry. This should assure all West Virginians that the pipeline will be built safely and in a way that protects the state's water quality," he said.

With federal authorization, upland tree felling and vegetation clearing has been underway in West Virginia for several days and will continue through the end of March.

"Once we receive a few remaining approvals from other state and federal agencies, we'll take the final step of requesting a Notice to Proceed with full construction from FERC. We expect to receive these remaining approvals in time to begin full construction activity by the early spring," Ruby said.